

Grand Blanc Family Sitting High and Dry After May Storms

When the severe storms, tornadoes, and flooding struck the lower part of the state in late May few had any idea that it would affect tens of thousands of Michigan families and more than \$51 million in grants and low-interest loans would be provided in disaster assistance, but for one Grand Blanc family the storms and flooding had the opposite affect. They were sitting high and dry and didn't need any disaster assistance, while what use to be their home was flooded again. Karen Minard couldn't believe her eyes when she returned to her old neighborhood near Thread Creek and discovered nine feet of water in the structure she had once called "home." In fact, she said that the flooding was as bad, if not worse, than the most damaging flood her family had endured.

"I was tired of getting flooded out," Minard exclaimed. When Thread Creek would flood, homes in that area experienced sewer backup. The double threat of flooding and sewage backup led the Minard family to participate in the buyout project. The Minards were one of five families who participated in a voluntary buyout program just seven months earlier. Four of the acquired homes were still awaiting demolition in May when flooding struck again.

In 2000 a flood inundated the city of Grand Blanc, located a short 10 miles south of Flint—severely damaging many homes and leaving roads impassible. Flooding from Thread Creek together with poor drainage caused major flooding that left homeowners helpless and city officials unable to control the rising creek. Together, they took a proactive approach to deal with the repeated flooding in their area. A federal disaster declaration made grant money available for mitigation projects throughout the state. Grand Blanc decided to pursue a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) project for the acquisition of homes damaged repeatedly from flooding.

According to Randy Byrne, city manager of Grand Blanc, city officials were getting tired of repairing the same damage after every flood and thought a proposal to acquire these homes at a cost share of 75% federal, 25 % non-federal match could help to solve the problem. The community submitted its proposal and the project was selected by the Michigan State Police/Emergency Management Division (MSP/EMD). When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approved funding city officials provided homeowners specific criteria for participation that included an appraisal and offer to buy out the property at pre-flood fair market value. Five homeowners decided to be a part of the voluntary project, and the federal share of the project was \$626,322.

In addition to the families who occupied the acquired homes, the community also benefited from the buyout. A major component of HMGP is that ownership of the acquired land reverts to the city with a deed restriction stating it must remain open space. The city used the land, demonstrating a conscientious approach to floodplain management, by incorporating it into Rusk Park. The 20-acre recreational park, containing footpaths, baseball diamonds, and tennis courts, will be expanded by two acres as a result of this project. When Thread Creek floods in the future, there is no maintenance required for the park. Costs to the city and the risk to homeowners have been greatly reduced.

When asked if he would pursue this type of project again, Byrne said, "It just depends on the number of times homeowners go through this before action is taken to get them out of harm's way." The key to involving the community in this type of project, according to Byrne, "is having a casual meeting and getting everyone on the same page." Informing the residents about the available options is imperative. Mitigation projects are a joint effort on local, state and federal levels. This project demonstrates how efforts on each level can contribute to fewer damages and lower risk. By being part of this project, the city no longer has to sandbag and callout public works crews to clean up the damage. Instead, the city has a larger park, a smaller risk of flooding and happier residents.



(Above) Floods were a common occurrence in Grand Blanc Michigan before the FEMA/State Mitigation effort buyout program. (Below) The area formerly occupied by homes was converted to recreational open space.

